

## Lawmakers protest Del. poultry ban (The News Journal)

Biden, Carper and Castle urge review -- saying decision was political

By NICOLE GAUDIANO

News Journal Washington Bureau

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WASHINGTON --

Delaware's congressional delegation charged that Russia's Sept. 1 decision to ban poultry imports from Mountaire Farms was based on politics, according to a joint letter to the U.S. trade representative.

Mountaire Farms plants in Millsboro and Selbyville are among the 19 plants affected nationwide by the Russian ban.

"Poultry

trade practices should not be used as a political pawn and we request a full review of the basis and implications of this decision by Russian authorities," Sens. Joe Biden and Tom Carper and Rep. Mike Castle wrote in their Sept. 16 letter to Ambassador Susan Schwab.

Russia cited health and disease concerns in its decision.

Delaware

companies exported a total of \$4.5 million in poultry to Russia in 2007, according to the International Trade and Development Office, part of Delaware's Office of Management and Budget.

While

exports are up so far this year -- to \$4.6 million in the six months through June 30 -- they've never been more than \$10 million since Delaware companies began exports to Russia in 1998 and account for only a small fraction of the state's \$739 million poultry industry.

Still, the lawmakers expressed "grave concern" with the decision and surprise "since Russian inspectors recertified Mountaire with a perfect 'A' score showing absolutely no deficiencies in their plants as of July 30, 2008. "

"This information leads us to believe that Russia's decision to limit poultry imports is not one based on safety concerns, but on political interest alone," they wrote.

Biden had accused Russia in August, just before the ban was put in place, of using non-tariff barriers as an excuse to block American poultry.

"Russia has repeatedly shown that it is not ready to abide by the rules of international trade," he said in a statement. "Let's not forget this is part of a bigger picture in which Russia has failed to behave as a responsible member in the international community. Until Russia reverses their recent actions -- both big and small -- its application to join the World Trade Organization should remain on hold."

Russia also issued a cautionary statement to 29 other U.S. plants, saying their products showed levels of certain substances higher than Russia allows, according to the U.S.A. Poultry & Egg Export Council.

U.S. producers say the first list of banned plants won't have much impact, but further bans could further dampen an already weak industry.

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